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TAGS: [PREL](#) [NATO](#) [MARR](#) [KFE](#) [RS](#) [GG](#) [MD](#) [BE](#)
SUBJECT: BELGIUM ARTICULATES ITS POSITIONS GOING INTO
BUCHAREST

REF: BRUSSELS 450

Classified By: Political Counselor Lynn Gurian, reasons 1.4 b/d.

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a tour d'horizon on issues to be discussed at the Bucharest summit, Belgium's Political Director for Multilateral Affairs told PolCouns on March 27 that: (1) CFE must survive; Belgium (GOB) welcomed Acting U/S Fried's continued openness in dealing with Russia on its concerns. Fried's constructive approach minimizes the potential for the U.S. being blamed in the event of failure; (2) enlargement is a "done deal," unavoidable politically and needed to stabilize the Balkans; however, the NATO requirements will challenge Albania and Macedonia. NATO must go forward in discussions with Montenegro and Bosnia, though discussions with Serbia would be premature, something to be welcomed but not forced. Belgium does not believe the Alliance should respond to every development in Europe with a plan to enlarge. (3) MAP - Belgium would not oppose progress on Ukraine and is ready to discuss it in Bucharest; Georgia is a more difficult case given the nation's more "shallow" public support. (4) Afghanistan) Belgium is committed to action there, but Belgium's parliament is pressing for an exit strategy; Belgium will raise this issue in Bucharest. (5) Kosovo remains politically fragile; it is important for KFOR, the EU, and UN to work in active and close coordination there. END SUMMARY.

THE RUSSIA FACTOR

¶2. (C) Political Director for Multilateral Affairs Jean-Arthur Regibeau began the discussion with CFE, stating &it is the cornerstone of peace and stability in Europe. It would be very negative if CFE disappeared." He voiced repeated admiration for the diplomacy and stamina that Acting U/S Fried has shown in dealing with the Russians, saying Belgium "warmly welcomes" Fried's constructive and open approach. Regibeau noted the Russians are tough negotiators, although on some issues they have some (unspecified) "legitimate points." Regibeau confirmed Belgium agreed with the U.S.-German CFE text of March 25, 2008, and would support it (reftel) unless substantially changed by other nations. Regibeau mused about Putin's plan to be in Bucharest, saying it is good Putin is planning to be there, but will he challenge NATO? Regibeau revealed Russian diplomats were scheduled to call on him on March 28. Regibeau will be part of Belgium's delegation to Bucharest.

ENLARGEMENT AND MAP

13. (C) Belgium accepts NATO enlargement as a "done deal," Regibeau continued, noting it is "unavoidable" at the political level in the countries of the incoming tranche and should help to stabilize the Balkans. He referred to challenges facing Macedonia and Albania to implement integration. Belgium believes NATO must increase its dialogue with Montenegro and Bosnia. With regard to Serbia, he thinks their joining NATO would be premature. Belgium would welcome Serbia in the alliance once the political situation there is stabilized, but Regibeau does not believe in forcing the issue there.

14. (C) With regard to MAP, Belgium makes a distinction between the applications of Ukraine and Georgia, but does not exclude a rapprochement between them in Bucharest. Belgium believes Ukraine is on the right path in terms of gaining an "internal balance" and in "reacting responsibly" to Russia by avoiding provocations. Domestically, public support for Ukrainian pre-admission is "not fully ripe," Regibeau judged. Belgium believes NATO should take care not to be seen as a divisive factor within Ukraine's domestic debate. The recent agreement between the government and opposition to support MAP is a good sign. Belgium would not oppose movement on Ukraine's application; however, the preferred GOB position would be a compromise showing that NATO welcomes Ukrainian membership but, given the "shallow" public support, not come across as heavy handed. Belgium is ready to listen to the arguments of NATO colleagues on this matter, Regibeau concluded.

15. (C) Georgia, Regibeau stated, is a more difficult case. Politically there are doubts about the validity of recent elections. The government has also been aggressive with

regard to Russia, answering provocation with the same level of response, i.e., "falling right into Russia's trap." Belgium shares with other allies the concern that such upping-the-ante of aggressive behavior not lead to a situation where, as a member, Georgia would be able to invoke Article 5 protection. Georgia's recent commitment to solve the &frozen conflicts by peaceful dialogue likewise seems to have "shallow" domestic support. Referring to the lesson of Cyprus membership in the European Union as a comparison, Regibeau said it was a "mistake" to have let the island join before its internal political status was resolved. Belgium does not want to shut the door to Georgia at Bucharest and would like the nation to join through MAP provided the required steps are met. NATO needs to be creative, he added, in dealing with the issues of Georgia.

MISSILE DEFENSE

16. (C) On missile defense, Regibeau cautioned that Belgium should be very careful and "stick with" its European partners. The GOB will not block missile deployment, but he believes it is too early to decide on the matter; the GOB remains open to a common alliance agreement, but Regibeau advised caution here. Regibeau queried rhetorically, what is the real nature of the Iranian threat and is MD the best way to address it? Belgium shares the views of southeastern Europe that the shield should cover all of Europe or it will divide the NATO security zone. The issue is where a diplomatic approach should be tried before a military route. A political agreement with Russia should be sought. That solution would be easier to sell in Europe, he concluded.

ISAF

17. (C) Regibeau reiterated Belgium's recently announced increased contributions to ISAF, including four F-16's, more troops and deployment to Kandahar, as an example where the new Belgian government is committed to greater involvement in a priority arena. However, he pointedly added that Belgium is in Afghanistan temporarily (though for an unspecified time at this point) and the Belgian Parliament

will press for an exit strategy. Belgium will make this point in Bucharesst.

KOSOVO

18. (C) Regibeau characterized Kosovo as &sensitive8 and the political situation there as &fragile.8 KFOR must continue to play an active role as a link with the UN and the EU. He believes KFOR must intervene in the north of Kosovo or wherever needed. Regibeau repeated the need for close coordination of KFOR, the EU and UN to keep the Serbs, through the Russians, from causing additional problems on the UN Security Council and to give Kosovo the stability and security it requires for its development.

BELGIUM IN THE ALLIANCE

19. (C) In general, Regibeau observed, Belgium questions whether enlargement is "always the best answer" to problems that arise for the Alliance. Belgium sees the Netherlands and Germany as its most like-minded allies in NATO, based on the three countries' common histories of the past century. Its policy of rapprochement with its closest geographic and socio/historic neighbors enable the Belgian government to leverage support for NATO policies from the Belgian parliament. The GOB formulates its policies in terms of what will be acceptable to parliament and the public. Parliament actively holds the foreign ministry accountable, particularly on political-military issues (e.g., recently announced increase in Belgian contributions to ISAF) which pacifist lawmakers closely monitor. Thus Belgium's sensitivity to prefer diplomacy to military action. The GOB would also like to see NATO try more peaceful diplomacy first. The best way to revitalize the Alliance is to let Europe have a sense of ownership, Regibeau mused; however the Europeans are divided. It will be important, he added, particularly vis-a-vis Russia, to show the Alliance stands together.

10. (C) Comment: Regibeau's perspective of Belgium's place and approach within NATO prior to Bucharest explained the GOB's views not only on the issues at hand but also on its

current broader orientation to the Alliance. Noteworthy is the government's sensitivity to parliamentary and public reaction. Regibeau does not expect major changes in foreign policy with the new Leterme government and MFA officials have been positive about NATO issues. However, Belgium will examine each issue seriously and wants to proceed with caution as well as strong Alliance consensus. FOX .